

# The Vital Importance of the Study and Practice of Hygiene in the Catholic Schools

Two Studies Will Take Right Prominence in School of the Future: Religion and Hygiene, Perfect Health of Body and Soul, to Insure a Strong, Useful Life and a Happy Eternity

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WITHIN fifty years hygienic study and practice have taken a prominent place in the thought of the people and the curricula of the schools. Hygienic theories have at the hands of European scientists received great attention and development, but the practice of them has devolved largely upon American educators and health boards, for reasons which will appear in the sequel. No country outside of Germany has equalled the United States in zeal for the education of the multitude. Formerly the State taught nothing; in the centuries previous to the nineteenth, after popular education began to receive some attention, the State taught the necessities only, religion and morality and the three R's. To-day the State has turned pedagogue, particularly in America, and has developed an educational scheme of tremendous complexity, high pressure and superlative expense in the solemn effort to teach every citizen what every citizen should know. Unhappily, to prevent healthy criticism of the State system, it has been so entwined in the public mind with the virtue of patriotism that the honest critic of faults and abuses in a purely human system is declared kin to traitors. The educational and political beneficiaries of the system have craftily encouraged this sentiment. Formerly it was the press that served as the palladium of our liberties; now it is the little red school-house, and millions of people fondly cherish the notion that training in the State school is synonymous with patriotism, almost the only source of patriotism. How easy to forget that the founders of this nation had no such training! It is religion and the morality which springs from its teachings, not mere mental training, which nourishes the truest patriotism. The factors which turned the State into a pedagogue are many, instructive and necessary to be known by those interested in the question of hygiene in the school.

The rise of the democracy and its needs is the prime factor. If the people are to rule in fact, as they are supposed to rule in theory, they must possess trained intelligence. The ignorant are sure to be ruled by the cultured. It is quite clear from the present situation of democracy all over the world that the people have a long path to travel before they can be sure of ruling anything. America is ruled by the money kings, not by the people; the money power has established itself firmly in the very teeth of the State school system; the directors of the money power are the very children of the State school. None the less is the State school training the citizens of the future in the ways of intelligence, and if it has given us our money kings it will in due time give us the king takers. Democracy made the State into a pedagogue.

The second factor was that idea of culture which prevailed at the opening of the nineteenth century. The French Revolution had practically abolished religion in many minds, and certain of the Illuminati assumed that religion as a social force was entirely played out. Still it was felt that some other force was needed to keep society going. It was thought by Ralph Waldo Emerson, as far as that cloudy philosopher may be said to have thought at all, and by the genial educator, Horace Mann, that culture might take the place of religion in shaping the destiny of the nation. No doubt it was an honest thought, but a test of sixty years has not demonstrated its efficiency. It had one lamentable effect upon the State school system, viz., the abandonment of the simplicities and the adoption of the complexities. The time needed for spelling and arithmetic was given to singing and biology, to drawing and geology, with such necessary consequences in our day as that the colleges will not accept the graduates of the system because they cannot spell, and the critics declare that the system takes five years too long for what it teaches, and the experts have built up a host of preparatory schools to make up for its deficiencies. The theory that culture can take the place of religion, that the citizen is entitled to culture at the expense of the State, made up the second factor.

The third was the desire to form the

patriotic citizen in his school days. This reason was as genuine as the first and well founded. All training of the human being must begin in the home, and then be continued in home and school and church together. When Europe sent millions of its people to our shores it was seen that the State school would be a potent force in molding the children of these immigrants into the American form. It was at first supposed that the assimilation of these foreigners would be a tremendous and critical task for the republic. It has not so proved. The school system absorbed the children without difficulty, and the other gracious influences of American life, plenty of work, fair wages, freedom and opportunity, have made assimilation up to this moment an interesting but not difficult problem.

The fourth factor in making the State a pedagogue was the opportunity which a wealthy State system gave the theorists to carry out their dreams. A study of the State school in the populous districts will show with what success these people worked. In sparsely settled regions they have not labored, although not without some influence there. Their theories were concerned with everything connected with schools, and their principal theory was borrowed from Socialism: That the State should do all for the child and the parent nothing. Hence the various schemes to provide the children with free lunches, toothbrushes, spectacles, clothing, artificial teeth and so on down a long list; next the rise to higher things by providing restaurants, dentists, oculists and the like; finally the advocacy of military training for the boys, of cooking for the girls, of manual training for both, and the introduction of an army of soldiers, cooks and athletes, with their paraphernalia. Socialism itself could do no more. Had not common sense and the expense interfered, the American child would have become a martyr to educational schemes and his teacher a dolorous victim of the theorists. On the whole, the American school system, while topheavy with unnecessary studies and undemocratic colleges and universities, has done well. Its striking merit is that society never before made so splendid an effort in behalf of popular education. Out of it should normally develop a noble system for the real training of the children, freer from the theorists, better adapted to the popular needs and purged of the stiff-necked bureaucracy.

From this brief review of the State educational system and the factors which helped to turn the State into a pedagogue, it is easy to see why and how the study of hygiene got its place in the curriculum. Health is a priceless asset of life and the only asset which the democracy may be said to possess. The culture idea of Emerson and Horace Mann never received any respect and support from the multitude, and has long been relegated to the school garret. For the poor, life has just two things worth while—getting a living and keeping in health. To genuine educators it has always seemed absurd to spend millions on teaching the *platoes* to the poor before they have learned how to get a living and how to preserve their health. It was not difficult for personal hygiene to get a strong footing in the educational system, hence the growth of gymnasiums and text books on physiology. Strictly speaking, hygiene has no more right to a place in the school curriculum than cooking or manual training; but the democracy wanted it instead of the culture idea, it is now strongly entrenched, and we have here to discuss only the reason for its presence and the best uses of it.

It is well to bear in mind how strong a hold the science and the art of hygiene have upon society at the present moment. The pair are but a little more than half a century old, yet innumerable scholars devote their lives to the science, physicians to the art and millions to the practice of personal hygiene. Splendid books have been written about all its divisions, personal, civic, racial. Its wonderful achievements have won the praise of mankind, as its aberrations have begun to excite alarm. The study of foods is reported in the daily papers. Universities make experiments in feeding for the benefit of mankind. Some restaurants print on their menu

cards the qualities of foods, singly and in combination, so that patrons may know what results to expect. Its expression in the health boards of cities and towns has been a great blessing; the bubonic plague checked in San Francisco; yellow fever annihilated in New Orleans; mosquito tracts cleared of their perils; the Canal Zone made habitable in the building of the Panama Canal. What an immense saving of life, money, happiness!

Moreover, as is well known, America has set up a standard of cleanliness, of hygienic care of persons, institutions, ports and towns, with which Europe is not familiar, except among the wealthy. The great mass of the European poor are quite indifferent to the bath, the use of soap, frequent changes of clothing, the towel, the toothbrush, the disinfectant, the removal of garbage, the extinction of vile odors. It is impossible of course for American children to sit in the same room with the children of certain immigrants. Consequently long before the theorists thought out their plans for the assimilation of Europeans the teachers in the schools had been busy in the task of cleaning these children and fastening upon them habits of American cleanliness. Thus, merely as a protection against the dirt of Europe, came hygienic practices and precepts. The theorists found the way prepared for their scientific plans; physiology followed hygiene, then came the gymnasium, next the instructors, finally more theorists, and at last the grand uproar over sex hygiene, which, while crowning the hygienic structure, nearly destroyed it through the rage and protest of indignant parents. This uproar, however, just served to show the good side of hygiene, its tendencies and its proper limitations.

The church, for specific reasons, like the State, became also a pedagogue; but the church school in its peaceful development here during the past seventy years has not been greatly disturbed, although it has been greatly influenced by the rapid and startling evolution of the State school system. Founded on great sacrifices of time and money and labor, in order to make up for the religious deficiency of the State system, lack of means has compelled it to follow the simpler way, to avoid complexities, to drive off fads and to do without gymnasiums and athletic instructors. Moreover, not having to look to culture as panacea or divinity, it has been spared the expense of that kind of worship. Its chief aim has been to keep the child from contamination by the world, to train him in the fear and love of God and in the way of the Commandments and to provide him with suitable education. In many ways the church system has been forced to imitate even the faults of the State system by the introduction of ornamental studies which should not be permitted, because parents desired them or made invidious comparisons; but it has resisted the introduction of novelties successfully, such as cookery, and for a long time it was successful in opposing the study of hygiene. Its partisans are still discussing that matter with heat, but circumstances being stronger than argument hygiene has acquired a fair but not important place in the church schools.

No one need regret the circumstance nor the result. A casual glance at the revolution accomplished by hygienic study in the school proves its immense value to the teachers and the children. Half a century back few schools thought of such matters as ventilation, light, the size and form of desks, the necessities of nature. A school could be held anywhere, in loft or cellar or back room, with one or more teachers, a few desks and a platform. Children sat in rows on the benches with their feet dangling, their bodies bent at various angles to ease the strain, actual martyrs to the ignorance of the time. Where the window was, or the gas jet, mattered not if the light was deemed sufficient. Desks had no known relation to the child's bodily form. His personal irregularities or deformities or deficiencies were matters of ridicule, not for examination and amendment. Indifference to extremes of heat and cold was supposed to be inherent in him, also indifference to the varieties of punishment. What a chasm between

the school of 1850 and that of the present year! What an immense and silent influence hygienic study has wielded in a single instance—the use of alcohol! There can hardly be a doubt that the teaching in the schools on that point has been an immense factor in the spread of prohibition.

To the question how far should the educational system carry the matter of hygienic study there will be two answers, one from the State system, the other from the church system. It is quite certain that the State system, with its salaried theorists and its immense funds will push the study to the limit. The discussion on sex hygiene proved that tendency and danger. The church system will be more just, moderate and humane, because from its lack of funds it will not be tempted to overdo; it will respect the children, not oppress them, and it will safeguard the teachers, who are too often overstrained by pitiless system. The hygienic teaching and practice of the church school will be benevolent rather than despotic, as so often happens to ruthless systems which demand impossible results because directed by hardened theorists. Since it is training Catholic American democracy it will be apt to take into consideration three things not too intelligently discussed or too widely known even in America. The educational systems of the republic are training the children for what we all hope to see the truest democracy in the world. It is assuredly different from the kind flourishing in other countries. It has no aristocracy and no economic slavery, like England in her nobility, her Ireland and her India; its constitutional freedom embraces all the people, unlike France, which knows freedom only as defined by the de facto Government, hated by the oppressed sections of the community; its national Government is the expression of the national will, unlike the South American republics, which are republics only in name and express the triumph of factions. American democracy is the model for the world, and the Catholic heaven in it should work for its perfection.

That is the first important thing in school hygienic training. The second is contained in the principle and the fact that man must live for this life as well as for the next. The overpious sneer at this matter, as the impious sneer at living for the life to come. They are the chief opponents of hygiene in the schools. They pretend that a healthy body is hostile to a lofty spirituality. It is the indulged body, not the healthy one, which is hostile. The one asset of the poor, as has already been said, is health and strength, and capitalism is forever scheming to steal that asset, as it has stolen all other tools, factories, machines, land, raw material and opportunity. It is the business of a vigorous democracy to see that the one asset be secured to the poor. The church withdrew its children from the State system because that system neglected the life of the soul. It seems quite fit then that in addition to looking after the souls of the children it should also pay special attention to the health and strength of the children, their one asset in the struggle of life. With the church the life is more than the meat, not only the life eternal, but the earthly life. Hygiene seeks to develop, to store up, to conserve that one asset of the poor, the health of the body. Without that the richest is very poor indeed. Without that the poor are wholly lost in life's battle.

The third thing is that school hygienic training must be Christian in principle and methods. Some people sneer too at that idea. Since hygiene has merely to build up a healthy body, what has the Christian religion to do with it? The same class of people used to say the same thing years ago about arithmetic. What has religion to do with arithmetic? Since the predatory trusts began teaching and practising their particular kind of arithmetic the sneerers have found out in their own losses how much religion has to do with arithmetic. As there is a pagan hygiene, so there

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